Working with young children with trauma – applying practice principle 8 reflective practice

Case Study

Collect information Think deeply about all aspects of practice	The educators working in an education and care setting were concerned about several newly enrolled babies and toddlers whose families had arrived recently as refugees from Somalia. The parents and the children were finding separation difficult. The children were not enjoying meal times and did not settle at rest times. The strategies that the educators had used previously to provide support for children and families in transition periods did not seem to be working well.
Question/analyse Use critical questions to challenge assumptions and analyse current practice Learn about yourself and how you work with children and families	At a staff meeting the Coordinator asked questions to help the educators reflect more deeply about their concerns for the children and families and what they could do to support them: • Why are the strategies we have previously used to help children and families settle and feel safe and welcome in the centre not working? • What do we know about Somali culture and child rearing practices? • What do we know about these particular children? • What might we need to think about? • What could we do differently? • Who or what could help us? Through reflecting on, researching and debating these questions, the educators recognised that, although there were families and children from diverse cultural backgrounds in the setting, most of the educators had not worked with recently arrived refugee children and families. Some educators thought that it was *just a matter of time* and the children and families would *settle in due course*. The discussion also revealed that there were some misunderstandings about which country in Africa these families came from and their experiences as refugees. One educator suggested, *Maybe our previous transition strategies work well for some families and children, but they are not working here and we can't just hope time will make it better.*
Plan	Further discussion helped the educators to understand the implications of the fact that these were families whose experiences differed from those of other families in the centre, including migrant families.
Act/do Take action as a result of deep thinking and critical questioning	The educators decided that they needed to act and not wait, as the childrens and families' wellbeing was a priority for them. They planned immediate and longer-term actions including: • rearranging the morning roster so that there was an

	additional educator available to welcome families and help children settle in. • working with an interpreter to discuss the transition experiences with the families, understand from their perspective why it was difficult and get ideas from them that might make it work better. • asking families for suggestions for meals that could be prepared for all the children at lunchtime so that the smells and tastes as well as the way the food was served would be more familiar for the new children. • asking families about sleeping practices at home so that they could include adaptations of these in their current sleep or rest routines. • finding more specific information about refugee experiences and the likely impact on children and families to help increase the educators' professional knowledge and decision-making capacity. The new practices or strategies that flowed from the actions had some immediate positive outcomes for the children and families.
Reflect/Review	The educators continued with the long-term actions and made changes to practice as they adopted suggestions from the families and gained deeper insights from other resources.

Notes

Reflection

A parent asked a family day care educator why she didn't teach her four-year-old son the alphabet. The parent said she thought it was important for her child to know the alphabet before he started school the following year. The educator explained to the mother that while she didn't teach the alphabet through lessons, there were many opportunities where the children learnt about written words and the letters of the alphabet. She gave examples, such as when the children looked at a recipe with her, recognised their names on the placemats, or asked for help to write their name on a drawing.
Later, the family day care educator talked with her field worker about the request and together they discussed the ways the program supported children's literacy development and learning. They also discussed how the educator could talk about this with families.

Think about what you know about early literacy and how you would define it. You might find it helpful to look at Learning and Development Outcome 5 in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: *Children are effective communicators*, which highlights the many different ways young children learn literacy and language skills, including through spoken language, gestures and actions.

Think about the ways you teach language and literacy to young children. How does your everyday practice support children to be effective communicators? What more do you need to know about children's literacy and language development? Where could you find this information?

Think about the issue in the example from different perspectives (child, parent, educators, family day care centre, the school). Whose perspective do you focus on most? Why? Is there a conflict between your philosophy, your commitment to partnerships and this request? Can you explain the reasons for this conflict?

Notes

discussion starter

Refer to your responses to the previous Reflection activity to complete this discussion.

What have you learned about yourself and how you work with children and families? Be honest as you think about and discuss this. For example:

- Have you learned anything about why you are sometimes unable to meet families' requests and your feelings about that?
- What have you learned about your own willingness to be flexible? Are there some areas where you are more flexible than others? If so why?
- What have you learned about looking critically at an issue and from different perspectives as a way of helping you to see it more clearly?

If you were the educator in this example, would you change your practice or take action as a result of your reflection on the parent's request?

Identify your reasons.

1. How would you explain your decision to the family?

2. How would you monitor any changes you set up?

Reflective questions

1. What changes in practice have come from reflecting *on* and *in* your practice?

2. Can you identify further opportunities for reflection *on* and *in* practice in your setting?

3. What is one step you can take to create or strengthen a culture of critical reflection in your workplace?

Notes

Reflective questions

1. Why is it helpful to have different perspectives on children?

2. What does it mean to have an *holistic view of the child*? Why is it important?

3. How does having a holistic view of children affect the way you plan for their learning and development?

Notes

Discussion Starter

You have started at a new service that needs to develop a service philosophy to underpin its policies and practices.

1. How will you initiate this process?

2. Who will be involved? Why?

3. Who can help with this process?

4. How can the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework support the development of your philosophy?

5. What theories about child development, learning and curriculum will underpin your philosophy?

Notes

Discussion Starter

Think about the statements in the table and identify the practices in your setting that support or match them.

Identify further practices you could implement to reflect these statements.

Statement
Children are capable, interested learners from birth.
Practice
Statement
Families are the most important people in children's lives.
Practice

Reflective questions

1. Can you articulate some of the key values that inform your work with children and families?
    - If so, where do these come from?
    - How do they affect your practice?

1. Are your values and beliefs similar or different to those of other professionals who work in your setting or those of the families in your community?
    - How could you find out about other's views?
    - Why might others hold different values and beliefs?
    - What strategies can you use to negotiate shared understandings across different values or beliefs?

Notes

Case study

You can start with any topic so long as you take it deeper. For example, we have recently reflected on the use of dummies at rest time and why children might be distressed at not having them. Last year we even did some reflective practice about the staff dress code as a result of a staff member wearing a singlet to work.
(Educational leader in an education and care setting)

1. What do the educator's comments in the above example about *taking it deeper* mean?

2. Why is it a good idea to reflect more deeply? What are the risks if you don't think deeply about all aspects of your practice?

Notes

Discussion Starter

In one kindergarten, the children always have indoor experiences followed by a group experience and then go outside for the outdoor program.

At a staff meeting a new staff member said that she found the separation between indoor and outdoor experiences difficult to manage. She was used to working in a centre where children could choose to participate in outdoor or indoor learning experiences as both spaces and experiences were available at the same time.

Reflect on your responses to the questions below with colleagues and compare the similarities and differences and the reasons for these. You could also adapt these questions to examine practices that are taken for granted in your setting.

- What beliefs underlie this practice?
- What are the benefits for children from the current practice?
- What are the benefits for educators from the current practice?
- Who would benefit from changing to an indoor-outdoor program? What might those benefits be?
- Does the current practice limit children's sense of agency and capacity for decision-making?
- What would children and families think about a different approach to the program?
- What challenges might arise from adopting an indoor-outdoor program?
- How could those challenges be addressed?
- Could a change improve learning and development outcomes for children?
- If a decision were made to change the program how would educators know if it has been worthwhile for children's learning and development?
- How long would the educators need to trial the change?
- If some educators were unsure about making this type of program change, what might help to address their concerns?

Notes

Reflective questions

1. How might the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework help you examine your practices?

2. Identify a question or topic in the Framework that attracts your attention or interest:
   - Why does this question interest you?
   - How will you start reflecting deeply on it?
   - Who will you reflect with?

Notes

Reflective questions

Ask families:

- What do they value most about the early childhood setting – what are its strengths?
- What could be improved?

Discuss with families how these align with and differ from your own perceptions of strengths and areas for improvement.

If there are differences, make a plan to address them.

Notes

Uses for reflective questions

Teaching and learning purpose	Reflective questions or things to wonder about
Help children to connect current learning with past experiences or learning (transfer of learning from one context to another)	*Do you remember when we…?* *What do you remember about…?* *What do you know about…?*
Help children to build on existing skills or knowledge	*What other ways could you…?* *What do you want to know more about?* *I'm wondering how you…?*
Support children to reflect on what they already know and can do	*What do you know about…?* *How do you know that?* *Who helped you to learn…?*
Help children think about where they can find more information about things that interest them and who could help them to find that information	*How can we find out more?* *Where would we find that information?* *Who could help us to find…?*
Promote further exploration, investigation and hypothesising	*What else might work?* *How could we fix this problem?* *What would happen if…?*
Show that you value children's many ways of expressing their learning (what they know and can do)	*What other ways could we…?* *How interesting that you…* *I've never thought about doing it that way…*
Encourage learning from and with others (collaborative learning)	*How could we learn from…?* *Why is it better to work with someone else to…?*

discussion starter

3.

1. Discuss with colleagues how you might get children's views about what they like and don't like about their experiences in your setting.
   Focus on children's perspectives on either indoor or outdoor experiences or spaces.

   You could do this by:

   - talking with them
   - paying attention to their moods and reactions during different parts of the experience or day
   - encouraging them to discuss or draw the things they like and dislike
   - encouraging them to take photographs of spaces or experiences they enjoy.

4.

2. Make an action plan to address the parts that they aren't positive about. Where possible include children in developing the action plans. In your action plan include some strategies for identifying the positive (or unintended) outcomes from the changes you make.

Notes

Reflective questions

1. What systems and processes do you have in place to reflect on children's learning and development and how best to support it?

2. What systems and processes do you have in place to reflect with children about their learning and development and how best to support it?

3. What systems and processes do you have in place to reflect with families about children's learning and development and how best to support it?

Notes

Notes

This document is licensed by WHGNE under a Creative Commons Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
To view a copy of this license. visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0

BY: Credit must be given to Women's Health Goulburn North East. the creator. **NC:** Only non-commercial use of the work is permitted. **SA:** Adaptations must be shared under the same terms.

Women's Health Goulburn North East
Phone: (03) 5722 3009
Email: whealth@whealth.com.au
www.whealth.com.au

women's health
goulburn north east
challenging inequity, embracing diversity